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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 623rd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 19 May 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. OUEDRAOGO

CONTENTS

COOPERATION WITH OTHER UNITED NATIONS BODIES, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER COMPETENT BODIES

* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting (closed).

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GE.00-42353 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER UNITED NATIONS BODIES, SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER COMPETENT BODIES (agenda item 5)

1. Ms. MILLER (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF would provide the Committee with more detailed information at a later date regarding the initiative for a world partnership for children launched by Mr. Mandela and Ms. Machel. In a letter addressed to leading figures in the world of politics, economics, science, culture and sport, Mr. Mandela and Ms. Machel had urged them to mobilize on children's behalf and take steps to improve the fate of children who were victims of armed conflicts, to combat the spread of avoidable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and to put an end to discrimination, particularly against girl-children, and to situations of extreme poverty.

2. UNICEF had recently organized a regional conference in Lomé on the promotion and protection of women's and children's rights, in which ministers from 23 West and Central African countries had participated. The participants had considered issues such as bringing national legislation into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, public funding of the implementation of the two Conventions, and establishment of national structures to coordinate action on behalf of children and women; they had prepared a plan of action and committed themselves to promoting implementation of the Conventions in their own countries and to coordinating efforts to promote them at the regional level.

3. On the initiative of UNICEF and the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, it had been decided two months before to establish posts of children's rights advisers within the United Nations Department of Peace-keeping Operations. One adviser was already out in the field in Sierra Leone and another would shortly arrive in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; their task would be to advise the head of mission on all issues relating to the protection of children, on coordination between the United Nations mission and the United Nations specialized agencies, including UNICEF, and on the role of NGOs specializing in the rights of the child. In addition, they would provide support to Governments in preparing their reports for submission in accordance with the Convention.

4. Lastly, she said UNICEF and OHCHR had prepared a joint project to promote activities by national human rights institutions in support of children's rights, since few countries had established a post of ombudsman for children. The project would include an assessment of whether the institutions had staff and funding to deal with children's rights.

5. Ms. HOLST (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that the World Education Forum held in Dakar between 26 and 28 April had been an opportunity to report on the work done as part of the Education for All 2000 assessment, launched in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1989. The assessment had been conducted at the international, national and regional levels and was the most comprehensive evaluation of education ever undertaken. It had revealed considerable progress in ensuring quality education but also widening gaps between the various education systems. The Dakar Framework for Action, adopted at the Forum, defined a

set of broad, interdependent objectives and 12 global strategies for attaining them, including extending the scope of activity to informal education, training and literacy, and promoting partnership between State authorities and civil society.

6. The World Education Report 2000 provided an overview of a series of commitments undertaken by the international community in order to implement the right to education. It included an analysis of the progress made in implementing the right to education in various regions of the world and a set of indicators relating to basic aspects of education in more than 180 countries.

7. UNESCO had launched its "Innocence in Danger" programme as a means of following up its plan of action to combat child pornography and paedophilia on the Internet by supporting specialists and NGOs in that field; it sought to group together Internet professionals, child protection specialists, public figures and political leaders in national action groups, in order to sensitize world opinion and mobilize human, technical and financial resources. Regional forums had been organized in Greece for the Balkans and the Mediterranean, in Brussels for Europe and in Buenos Aires for Latin America.

8. As part of the International Year for the Culture of Peace, UNESCO was currently preparing a symposium on the teaching of values to be held in Paris in the autumn, which would bring together child experts and representatives of member States in order to produce guidelines and formulate concrete action to be taken in that regard.

9. Ms. ALLEN (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child) said that the Group was a federation currently comprising 44 international institutions specializing in the defence of children's rights; it was in contact with associations in more than 100 countries and was continually aiming to expand its audience.

10. The Group had several publications to its credit, including a guide for NGOs on the preparation of reports to be submitted under the Convention and background documents on issues such as sexual exploitation and child labour. It would soon be publishing another guide for NGOs, on ways of improving their monitoring of the implementation of children's rights and of developing their promotion activities. It would contain a great deal of advice for NGOs, particularly on setting up dynamic networks, developing strategies on the various issues surrounding children's rights, pressing for legislative and policy reform, organizing campaigns in support of children's rights and participation, the operation of the system for preparing reports for the Committee and the implementation of the Committee's observations.

11. Mr. BURGER (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said he wished to raise the question of how to establish cooperation between indigenous organizations and the Committee, and to describe some of OHCHR's current and planned work on behalf of children and young people from indigenous groups. A workshop would be held in Geneva in July to sensitize NGOs to the issue of indigenous children and young people, and indigenous peoples' main concerns would be raised there. The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations had suggested devoting its meetings of 25 July to a dialogue between indigenous children and young people, on the one hand, and government experts and members of United Nations committees, on the other.

12. The Committee on the Rights of the Child paid almost as little attention as other United Nations bodies to the fate of the 500 million indigenous people, despite the fact that they were clearly disadvantaged in the areas of education and health and that most of them were beset by armed conflict and extreme poverty. An information meeting on the Committee's work with regard to indigenous populations would therefore be useful insofar as it would make it possible to consider how indigenous peoples' representative bodies could contribute to the Committee's work and how the Committee could assist them.

13. Mr. TAPLIN (International Monetary Fund) said that IMF had recently set up a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF), which, although not explicitly aimed at children, should nevertheless help improve their conditions and reinforce the implementation of the Convention. It was a new mechanism, the product of a concern to integrate IMF programmes to boost growth in low-income countries more fully into poverty-reduction strategies, enable those countries to take greater control over such programmes, and improve their funding. PRGF would operate in parallel with the IMF and World Bank debt relief programme (highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative).

14. The programmes PRGF-funded would be part of a strategic poverty-reduction programme drawn up by the Government of the borrowing country with the active involvement of civil society, NGOs, donors and international institutions. In that way, the initiative would belong both to the country and to the people. The authorities would be required to keep civil society informed about the implementation of the programme and to involve it in follow-up activities, the aim being to make countries more responsible and to motivate them to attain the declared objectives. IMF, the World Bank and other multilateral and bilateral donors would be stakeholders in the process.

15. Ms. NOGUCHI (International Labour Office) thanked the Committee for consistently recommending to countries presenting their reports that they should ratify ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 on child labour.

16. Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, which had been adopted unanimously in 1999, had to date been ratified by 15 countries, one of which, the United States, had not yet acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Convention No. 138, on the minimum age of admission to employment, adopted in 1973, had been ratified by 89 of the 175 ILO member States, 20 of which had done so following a campaign for ratification of the Convention, launched in 1999.

17. ILO continued to transmit the Committee's concluding observations to its offices abroad, which took account of them in their multi-sector assistance programmes. It had also kept the two working groups on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child informed about the status of ratification of Convention No 182. ILO's work was not only relevant to article 32 of the Convention - the definition of the worst forms of child labour - but related also to articles 33 (narcotics production and trafficking), 34 (sexual exploitation), 35 (sale of and traffic in children) and 38 (recruitment into the armed forces). It was not enough to prohibit child labour, however, and steps needed to be taken in many other areas such as birth registration, education, health and social welfare.

18. ILO continued to collaborate with other organizations. In particular, it had taken part in the World Education Forum, had set up a research project on child labour statistics together with the World Bank and UNICEF, and was liaising with WHO with a view to defining areas of cooperation, in particular regarding hazardous work.

19. Ms. NYGREN-KRUG (World Health Organization) said that WHO had organized a regional training seminar in Europe, as an extension of those it had organized in South-East Asia and at WHO headquarters, on its contribution to the preparation of reports on the implementation of the Convention, the aim being to prepare a handbook on the subject for its own staff and health ministry officials.

20. WHO was making every effort to incorporate human rights and children's rights standards into its public health policies and made use of all existing instruments in implementing its human rights-based health policy. It had extended its definition of health to include the notion of the well-being of the various population groups, including children. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had recently invited WHO to help draft a general comment on the right to health and had taken the opportunity to apply the WHO definition of health and request that the indicators which the comment suggested establishing should be more closely geared to measuring differences between social groups.

21. Any general comments the Committee on the Rights of the Child wished to formulate should be as clear and concise as possible in order to facilitate implementation; WHO would be interested in helping in their preparation.

22. Ms. EL GUINDI asked whether UNICEF had prepared special recommendations on poverty for those taking part in the special session of the General Assembly, to be held in Geneva in June 2000, to assess the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development held five years previously in Copenhagen.

23. Mr. FULCI asked what concrete measures UNICEF planned to take to ensure the success of the initiative launched by Mr. Mandela and Ms. Machel.

24. Mr. DOEK asked WHO to provide information on the progress of a project currently under way to detect cases of child abuse and negligence, inter alia. The information would be useful to the Committee in its discussions on article 19 of the Convention.

25. He asked whether ILO's project on child labour statistics was a new one or a continuation of a previous project; he wondered how data on illegal work was collected. He requested ILO to give its views, in writing if possible, concerning the areas covered both by Convention No. 138 and by the two draft optional protocols recently approved by the Commission on Human Rights. He asked what progress had been made in implementing the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

26. Lastly, he asked whether IMF would be able to provide technical assistance to States parties to enable them to make specific budget allocations for services to children in the areas of health, education and social welfare.

27. The transmission of values was an important aspect of the aims of education, referred to in article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention; the Committee was currently preparing a general comment on the subject and it would be useful if UNESCO could report to the Committee on the outcome of the meeting on values education planned for the autumn.

28. National institutions in a number of countries - non-governmental, governmental and mixed - were doing work relating to human rights. Would it be possible to provide supplementary information on UNICEF projects designed to evaluate those aspects of the work relating specifically to children and improving the coordination and monitoring of everything regarding the implementation of children's rights?

29. He welcomed the publication by the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child of a guide that should make NGO cooperation with the Committee more effective.

30. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TAHTELÄ said she thought it was encouraging that Governments should be called on to develop a poverty-reduction strategy in cooperation with civil society, as part of the IMF's poverty-reduction programme. The ultimate objective should be to completely eliminate poverty, which was a major obstacle to the enjoyment of human rights. Experience showed that development programmes succeeded in countries where civil and political rights were respected, the affairs of State were well managed and transparency prevailed. The establishment of child protection advisers within United Nations peace-keeping missions was a welcome initiative, and the Committee awaited with interest any report on the outcome.

31. Ms. MOKHUANE welcomed the fact that WHO had adopted a children's rights-based approach and had decided to look into the issue of data on social well-being. Would any indicators in that area be provided? The method used by WHO to break down statistical data by age group prevented the Committee from obtaining a clear idea of adolescent health because a single age group covered the ages of 15 to 49. Generally speaking, the information on mental health provided in government reports and by WHO was not detailed enough. Would it be possible to obtain figures on the proportion of the population with access to mental health-care facilities and on the services and staff available in that sector?

32. Ms. KARP welcomed the fact that a number of agencies had adopted a children's rights-based approach. The Convention was global in nature and it was therefore appropriate to take action of an equally global nature. It might be useful to form a discussion group to consider the role of the various agencies in such an approach. The group could be composed of representatives of the agencies involved, or wishing to be involved, in the process. That would enable resources to be shared and everyone's experience to be exploited.

33. Ms. RILANTANO asked the ILO representative what results had been obtained in the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). She underlined the importance of the two goals of poverty eradication and transmission of values.

34. She also asked whether there was any explanation for why IMF aid brought results in some countries but not in others. Were there any particular constraints? She inquired whether members of the NGO Group for the Convention received regular training on monitoring the implementation of children's rights and on preparing reports.

35. Mr. RABAH asked whether any difficulties had been encountered in implementing the ILO programme on the elimination of child labour.

36. Ms. NYGREN-KRUG (World Health Organization), referring to article 19 of the Convention, said that the reports prepared as part of the WHO project on standards for diagnosis would be forwarded to the Committee. On the question of moving towards a global human rights-based approach, she said the process would take time and it was not yet possible to give clear answers. The emphasis would be on standards of non-discrimination, health status and vulnerable and marginalized groups. It was not simply a matter of attaining the highest possible standards of health. Attention also needed to be paid to the right to education, training, privacy and participation, and the right to benefit from scientific advances, all of which were fundamental to a human rights-based concept of health. Health was not a purely medical concept.

37. It would almost certainly be at least two years before WHO's current work on indicators of social well-being would yield any results; WHO had begun to study health systems and assess how far they matched needs, and would attempt to determine how far they guaranteed respect for such rights as the right to dignity and privacy.

38. In the interests of rationalization, WHO would begin to break its statistical data down further, particularly age-group data; it would be helpful to work with the Committee in that area. Lastly, she said WHO would ensure that data on the mental health situation was communicated to the Committee, as requested.

39. Ms. NOGUCHI (International Labour Office) said that it was as yet difficult to report on the progress of IPEC because the programme involved some 90 donor and beneficiary countries and was continually expanding. However, ILO would be able, at future sessions, to give the Committee detailed information on progress in those countries whose reports it was considering. It was difficult to quantify the situation with regard to child labour, but the first results for a limited number of countries were available and would be published on the Internet.

40. The new cooperation project involving ILO, the World Bank and UNICEF aimed chiefly to analyse the situation in more global terms on the basis of a range of information prepared in varying contexts and from several different standpoints. The project was still in its initial phase and no results had yet been published, but the Committee would be kept informed of progress.

41. The ILO's standpoint on the scope of Convention No. 182 was that of the Governments and labour representatives that had adopted the Convention. Differences of opinion had emerged with regard to the involvement of children in armed conflicts, since ILO was considered by some not to be competent in the matter, while others argued that children involved in armed conflicts clearly belonged to the same social groups as those who were susceptible to the worst forms of child labour when there was no armed conflict. Ultimately, it had been decided to include the issue in the scope of Convention No. 182.

42. Prostitution and trafficking in children was a problem that had been addressed by Convention No. 29, of 1930, on forced labour, one of the oldest ILO conventions, but it had been felt that, for children, it would be sensible to group all aspects of the issue in a single instrument.

43. The Copenhagen Summit had made it possible to address the issue of child labour in the context of the international debate on social development; ILO believed that child labour was not so much a consequence of poverty as a factor in perpetuating it since it produced generations of people who were poorly educated and ill-equipped for adult life. It was a vicious circle and it was important for the approach that had emerged in Copenhagen to be reaffirmed at the special session of the General Assembly to be held five years on.

44. Mr. TAPLIN (International Monetary Fund) said that IMF was implementing an assistance programme in the areas of budgeting and accounting and had prepared a code of conduct on fiscal transparency that it was encouraging countries to follow. Aside from the purely technical aspect, the distribution of resources among the various sectors was the product of an internal political process.

45. IMF did not measure the success of its programmes only by looking at macroeconomic and financial criteria and it had noticed that the countries that took advantage of the enhanced structural adjustment facility were those that obtained the best macroeconomic results. With regard to the idea of a discussion group, he said there were already numerous inter-agency working groups and it would be preferable to use existing resources rather than establish a new body.

46. Ms. HOLST (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations) said that, since Committee members had expressed such interest in the meeting on the transmission of values, UNESCO would communicate the results to them. One UNESCO publication that might interest the Committee was the Dakar Framework for Action, which included a number of annexes that would soon be ready for publication. The Committee might also be interested in the results of an assessment of the situation in various countries regarding education for all by 2000, which were available on UNESCO's website. It did not seem to be a good idea to create a new body for inter-agency cooperation, but the matter deserved consideration, for example as part of the cooperation between UNESCO and UNICEF.

47. Ms. THEYFAZ-BERGMAN (NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child) emphasized that the Group was not itself an NGO and therefore did not directly provide training. Many of its members did so, however, working either alone or in cooperation with national partners or UNICEF, on such topics as the report-submission process, the monitoring of the Convention at the national level, cooperation with NGOs, and the strengthening of such cooperation at the national and regional levels. Thematic issues also accounted for a large part of training work. The Group was trying to build up its understanding of such issues, and six new NGOs that had recently joined the Group were interested in juvenile justice, sexual exploitation, AIDS, internally displaced persons and refugees. The Group's liaison service staff were frequently called upon to arrange training sessions at the national and international levels or to advise and assist national NGOs. For financial reasons, such assistance was usually given by electronic mail. National NGOs might also be interested in the discussions and workshops organized by subgroups within the Group.

48. Ms. MILLER (United Nations Children's Fund) said that as part of the follow-up conference to the Copenhagen Summit, UNICEF was planning a round table on children's rights and poverty, an issue dealt with in one of the two publications it was preparing specially for the

conference. The other dealt with children's rights and debt reduction, partly by studying the impact of the HIPC initiative and the enhanced structural adjustment facility from a standpoint that focused more closely on development than the IMF approach did.

49. A concrete example of UNICEF's cooperation with the private sector was the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) project, being conducted in partnership with WHO and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It was an ambitious project, aiming mainly to achieve universal vaccination coverage and research into new vaccines. UNICEF hoped that similar initiatives would be launched in other areas.

50. The idea of assessing national human rights institutions had emerged in 1999 from the special dialogue on children's rights that had taken place during the session of the Commission on Human Rights, between UNICEF and national human rights institutions. UNICEF had subsequently prepared a series of questions to put to such institutions to obtain information on their action on children's rights.

51. With regard to inter-agency cooperation and the idea of forming a discussion group, informal exchanges had already taken place at WHO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, with a view to defining the principles of human rights-based action. A working group had been given the task of studying how to take human rights into account in the United Nations reform process and in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework; the group met regularly in New York, and the Committee could almost certainly send a representative.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 12.10 p.m.